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TAGS: [EPET](#) [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DETAILS EMERGE ABOUT ATLAS COVE ATTACK

REF: LAGOS 297

Classified By: Consul General Donna M. Blair for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Details are beginning to emerge about the 12 July militant attack on the Atlas Cove fuel jetty in Lagos (Reftel). During a 14 July OSAC meeting, a security contact working for oil company BG provided RSO Lagos with details on the attack he says he received from a Nigerian State Security Service (SSS) contact. According to the BG security officer, 27 armed men in three speedboats approached the Atlas Cove fuel depot the evening of 12 July, entering the channel where Atlas Cove is located from the Atlantic ocean. The attackers were recruited from the Epe area of Lagos state and were supported by a "bomb squad" working for Delta State militant leader Tompolo. The armed men attacked the Atlas Cove facility in an attempt to gain access to the interior of the compound guarded by Nigerian Navy personnel. In a nearly hour long firefight, one Navy lieutenant commander and two enlisted men were killed. The militants were ultimately unable to gain entry into the compound, at which point they used dynamite to blow the a manifold on the pipeline that runs from the Atlas Cove jetty to the tank farm inside the depot. (Note: An interesting aspect of this story is that while the militant umbrella group MEND claimed credit for the Atlas Cove attack, Tompolo is not/not generally considered one of MEND's commanders. End Note.)

12. (C) Reports on casualties vary. While there is general agreement that three Nigerian navy personnel were killed in the attack, initial press reports said up to nine people total died in the attack, including several employees of the facility who were tied up by militants and subsequently burned to death in the explosion.

13. (C) RSO security contacts and Pol/Econ oil industry contacts agree the impact on Nigeria's supply of diesel fuel and other refined products is likely to be minimal. There are other facilities in Lagos port that can receive fuel and Atlas Cove itself has an alternate system for receiving refined products.

14. (C) In a statement released on 14 July, an element of MEND, through its purported spokesman Jomo Gbomo, dismissed what it said were exaggerated claims in the press that a large number of militants attacked the depot and a sustained gun battle took place. According to the statement, 18 total militants

in two speedboats attacked the depot and the Nigerian Navy guards fled their posts after militants fired a few rounds. (Note: A few local newspapers have reported that up to fifteen boats filled with militants attacked Atlas Cove and a sustained firefight ensued that involved rocket propelled grenades and heavy machine guns. End Note.)

15. (C) Comment: Not to cast aspersions on our BG contact, his SSS source or the Nigerian press, but we have our doubts about the attack as they describe it. Consulate personnel living across the channel and a mile away from the Atlas Cove facility did not hear sustained gunfire that evening, nor did the expatriate security officer for a nearby luxury hotel who spoke at length about the attack with RSO and Energyoff on 13 July. Certain elements in the SSS and the Nigerian military, specifically those responsible for security in Lagos, have every reason to play up the scale of this attack and the Nigerian Navy's supposed defense of Atlas Cove. They would not want to admit that a handful of "militants" strolled into the busiest port in Nigeria and the home of Nigeria's Western Naval Command and successfully attacked a fuel depot within eyesight of a Nigerian Navy frigate docked less than 500 yards away, apparently taking no casualties in the process. End Comment.

BLAIR